

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 30, 2021

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Administrator Criswell:

Thank you for your work leading the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) response to the devastation Tropical Depression Ida had on our communities. Our constituents were some of the hardest hit. In the Bronx, Queens, and Westchester, severe flooding left thousands with significant and irreplaceable damage to their homes and personal items. Thus, it is imperative that our constituents receive adequate FEMA reimbursement funds. Unfortunately, we write with significant concern that the FEMA reimbursement funds have been insufficient in allowing our residents to rebuild their homes and restore damaged property. We urge FEMA to provide sufficient financial assistance to families impacted by Hurricane Ida, and for an extension of the application deadline.

We have heard from countless residents in New York's 14th and 16th districts that the aid coming from FEMA has been insufficient, and in some cases, non-existent. For example, a constituent in the Village of Pelham, NY suffered multiple damages to their property, including a broken boiler, water heater, washer/dryer system, and structural damage to their basement. They applied for FEMA relief but only received \$5,500, which was vastly insufficient for repairing essential home infrastructure. Moreover, the approved fund would fail to ameliorate health and safety concerns. Another constituent in East Elmhurst was denied assistance after informing FEMA that she did not leave her home in the wake of the storm. Countless stories from constituents in our districts wondering about the limited relief. Many other constituents recount long processing times and automatic denials. Despite submitting applications in early September, some of our constituents have yet to receive a decision, let alone any funds to begin essential repairs.

These testimonials and feedback from constituents are reflective in the FEMA's data. As of November 22, 2021, there have been 10,694 registrations in Bronx County for FEMA's IHP program. Of those 10,694 applications, only 3,943 have been found eligible for IHP funding; 1,359 have withdrawn their application for assistance; 370 are awaiting a determination from their insurance carrier before eligibility can be determined; and 4,628 have been found ineligible, while 394 remain under review. As these alarming figures indicate, FEMA is not meeting the needs of thousands of individuals. We are also concerned that the current recovery assistance application deadline of December 6th, 2021 does not allow sufficient time for our constituents to apply for an appeal.

In FEMA's most recent Disaster Relief Fund Congressional Monthly Report, there remains more than \$46 billion in the Disaster Relief Fund. Many community members are simply unable to cover the costs from their own pockets, leading to unsafe living environments. The low pay-outs have resulted in additional paperwork via appeals, delayed responses, and residents being forced to turn to Small Business Administration loans to cover the rest of their recovery needs. We write to request additional information

on the low pay-outs that residents are receiving, the cumbersome application process, and efforts that FEMA is taking to remedy issues with low pay-outs.

Specifically, we request the following information:

1. Data on the disparity between the amount of Individual Assistance requested by households in eligible counties and the amount of Individual Assistance provided to households by FEMA.
2. Data on FEMA Individual Assistance provided to constituents, stratified by income level to understand the impact of low pay-outs on constituents with differing levels of economic stability.
3. An explanation of what further actions FEMA is pursuing to further support households who have received low pay-outs, including efforts to streamline the application process. We also welcome any recommendations from FEMA on how our offices can work collaboratively with you to remedy this issue.
4. Efforts to extend the deadline for application appeals for those who were initially deemed ineligible.
5. Information on what grounds the majority of applicants were deemed ineligible for disaster aid.
6. Any considerations for amending how eligibility requirements are met after a disaster.
7. What criteria do you use to determine award amounts for each applicant?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress